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SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE  
SELECTION OF CURRICULUM CONTENT

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read,  
and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for  
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## ABSTRACT

This study examines several factors which are generally considered by some curriculum theorists to be of relevance in selecting curriculum content. An attempt is made to expose some of the complexities involved in utilising such notions as student needs and interests, existing social conditions, and particular philosophical beliefs as criteria for selecting specific curriculum content in schools. In general, it is shown that such notions do not in themselves indicate which subjects ought to be included in the curriculum.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. DECIDING WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE WORTH-WHILE .....	9
III. JUSTIFYING THE SELECTION OF CURRICULUM CONTENT .....	28
IV. STUDENT INTERESTS .....	40
V. STUDENT NEEDS .....	53
VI. THE REALITIES OF THE SOCIAL MILIEU	65
VII. PHILOSOPHY AND CURRICULUM CONTENT .	76
VIII. CONCLUSION .....	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	92



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The question of "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?"<sup>1</sup> formulated by Herbert Spencer over a century ago still presents a central issue in education. The question itself is logically prior to all considerations of method and methodology and is in a sense the most fundamental question in education since it requires a consideration of the basic purposes of educational activity. For once having decided what purposes education ought to serve, then curriculum content can be selected which will to the best of our knowledge achieve the purposes we have in mind. From this point of view the relationship between educational purposes and curriculum content is rather like making a good wine. Depending on the purpose the wine is to serve, the ingredients will differ. In the same way, different educational purposes will require different educational content. Spencer's answer to the question as to what knowledge is of most worth was determined by the educational

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Spencer, Education, Intellectual, Moral and Physical (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911).





purposes which he decided were worth pursuing, and in his case the answer was that knowledge which would prepare the individual for what Spencer believed constituted "complete living". Scientific studies, especially those concerned with self-preservation and the maintenance of good health were of first concern while literary and classical studies were relegated to a place of relatively minor importance.

While Spencer's answer to the question was for him relatively straightforward, the selection of content matter in education remains a persistent area of disagreement amongst educational theorists. There often appear to be as many different ideas on what ought to be taught in schools as there are notions of what is desirable.

While curriculum developers have always had their criteria for selecting one set of subjects in preference to some other set, attention has seldom been given to considering the underlying assumptions on which such selection is based. The application of "screens" to collections of objectives is thought to result in inappropriate content being sifted out and significant content being left behind. Usually such "screens" are said to be either psychological, sociological or philosophical in nature.

As typical examples of the kind of criteria which curriculum developers utilize in selecting curriculum content, one can consider the work of Hilda Taba and Ralph W.





Tyler. Tyler's<sup>1</sup> rationale for selecting curriculum content begins with the development of objectives and educational purposes. Once having established these objectives they function as criteria for the selection of curriculum content. Therefore the process of establishing objectives is also one of developing criteria for the selection of curriculum content. For example, Tyler maintains that no single source of information is adequate to provide a basis for wise and comprehensive decisions about the objectives of the school. He suggests that different sources should be given some consideration in planning the curriculum but does not indicate the relative importance which is to be attached to each one. However, the factors he indicates as being of relevance in this process are:

- (1) Studies of the learners themselves. An analogy is drawn with a dietary deficiency which indicates the appropriate nutritional remedy. In much the same way, studies of the learners are said to indicate needs which education can remedy.
- (2) Studies of contemporary life outside the school. These studies are said to provide significant information for the curriculum specialist by indicating the important aspects of contempor-

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph W. Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969).



ary life which the student needs to be familiar with in order to succeed either socially or vocationally.

- (3) Suggestions from subject specialists. According to Tyler, the nature of these suggestions is contained in answer to the question "What can your subject contribute to the education of young people?". He states:

They (subject specialists) have a considerable knowledge of the specialized field and many of them have had opportunity to see what this subject has done for them and for those with whom they work. They ought to be able to suggest possible contributions, knowing the field as well as they do, that it might make to others in terms of its discipline, its content and the like.<sup>1</sup>

It is from reports of this sort regarding both the major contributions that specialists think the subject can make and also the more specific contributions that the subject might make to other major functions that one is able to infer objectives.

- (4) Inferences from philosophy. The heterogeneous collection of objectives obtained thus far are screened by reference to the educational and social philosophy to which the school is committed, so as to eliminate the "unimportant and

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<sup>1</sup>Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, pp. 26-7.



contradictory ones."

- (5) Suggestions from information on the learning process. Information gained from research on learning is said to indicate those learning outcomes which can be expected to result from a particular learning process. A knowledge of the psychology of learning is said to indicate what are attainable objectives at appropriate levels of development.
- (6) Stating objectives in behavioural form. This criterion is a merely formal one which Tyler suggests is helpful in indicating more precisely appropriate learning experiences. Tyler maintains that since education aims at bringing about significant changes in student behaviour, objectives should be stated in a form which indicates the kinds of behavioural changes which are to be brought about. Presumably these objectives which cannot be appropriately stated in behavioural form will be discarded.

For Tyler, the resulting objectives serve as criteria for the selection of curriculum content. In the final analysis it appears that the selection of what is worth including in the curriculum is principally the result of what learners need, what society indicates as important and useful, what





subject specialists say can be achieved, what school philosophies consider valuable, what psychology indicates is appropriate and attainable, and what can be stated in the form of a behavioural objective.

Hilda Taba<sup>1</sup> takes a somewhat similar view when she maintains that whatever criteria are established for the selection of curriculum content, they need to be applied as a collective set of "screens" through which to sift the possibilities in order to ensure that only experiences that are valid in the light of all pertinent considerations find their way into the curriculum. She claims the following criteria are useful as guides in selecting appropriate curriculum content:

- (1) Curriculum content should be valid and significant. i.e., it should reflect contemporary scientific knowledge and should be fundamental and basic to the field.
- (2) Curriculum content should be consistent with the social and cultural realities of the times. It should develop loyalties to democratic values and the capacity to adapt to change.
- (3) Curriculum content should provide a balance of both breadth and depth. i.e., content should be selected to provide the greatest range of

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<sup>1</sup>Hilda Taba, Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1962).



applicability and the greatest power to transfer.

- (4) Curriculum content should provide for a wide range of objectives. i.e., it should not only involve the acquisition of knowledge but also more effective ways of thinking, desirable attitudes and interests, appropriate habits and skills etc.,. In other words, different behaviours involved in different areas of objectives require different types of learning experiences to attain them. Thus learning opportunities should be wide and extensive.
- (5) Curriculum content should be learnable and adaptable to the experiences of the students. In other words, it should be appropriate to the abilities of the students.
- (6) Curriculum content should be appropriate to the needs and interests of students. Taking into account student needs and interests not only aids the learning process but also facilitates further growth and development.

With the criteria described by both Tyler and Taba in mind, the present work attempts to examine some of the theoretical problems associated with selecting curriculum content. In general, the criteria which have been described suggest psychological, sociological and philosophical consid-





erations which are taken into account when establishing criteria for selecting curriculum content. In the following chapters, these criteria will be discussed with a view to examining the assumptions and theoretical difficulties which they involve.



## CHAPTER II

### DECIDING WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE WORTHWHILE

We generally agree that the activities which occur inside classrooms ought to be in some way worthwhile to those who experience them. In general, we believe that the knowledge and understanding which a child acquires in the process of being educated ought to have some merit to it. Indeed, as Peters<sup>1</sup> indicates, to say that a person is being educated as distinct from being taught, is to imply that something worthwhile has been going on. Furthermore, it would be unusual to say that a person had been educated but had not changed in any way for the better. In this sense Peters maintains that "education" is like "reform" in that it denotes something of value. He states:

For if something is to count as 'education', what is learnt must be regarded as worthwhile just as the manner in which it is learnt must be regarded as morally unobjectionable; for not all learning is 'educational' in relation to the content of what is taught.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R.S. Peters, "What is an Educational Process?" in The Concept of Education edited by R. S. Peters (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 1-23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 4.



However, it sometimes seems that "education" does not necessarily carry this connotation of value which Peters suggests. In fact, in such works as Paul Goodman's Growing Up Absurd, George Leonard's Education and Ecstasy, and Postman and Weingartner's Teaching as a Subversive Activity, there is the explicit suggestion that being "educated" carries with it the connotation of conformity, bookishness, absorption with the irrelevant and an absence of creativity. However, as Peters indicates, the connection of education with commendation does not prevent one from talking of a poor education when "a worthwhile job has been botched".<sup>1</sup>

However, the more interesting aspect of Peters' theory from the point of view of this work is his claim that being educated involves initiation into "worth-while activities". In Ethics and Education<sup>2</sup> Peters devotes some considerable time and space to a discussion of what are to count as worthwhile activities and the criteria appropriate to their selection. For while the curriculum of a school may present a series of options, the choice available is between a range of activities that are thought to be worth passing on.

Peters maintains that there must be good reasons for pursuing curriculum subjects quite apart from any utilitarian

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>R. S. Peters, Ethics and Education (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman Co., 1967), Chapter IV.





or vocational value which they might have, since to regard them as having educational value they must be pursued for their own sake and not for the sake of some instrumental end. For, "activities like science and art have no straightforward appeal . . . they offer sweat and struggles rather than immediate delight and their instrumentality to the satisfaction of other wants is difficult to discern."<sup>1</sup>

However, justification of some activities in terms of wants is not entirely ruled out by Peters. Certainly there is the obvious enough difficulty associated with all forms of naturalism, namely that because an activity is desired or wanted by an individual or by people in general, it does not thereby follow that it is worth-while. Nevertheless, while wanting something is not sufficient, it is a necessary condition in establishing that something is worth-while. For as Peters maintains, it would be an unusual state of affairs if something was worth-while yet no one wanted it. In addition, it would be an unusual state of affairs if someone understood science and art and yet did not feel drawn toward such activities, for to understand something is to be committed in some way to its pursuit. When viewed from the "inside" such activities involve an acceptance of the point of the activity and the standards of skill, efficiency and style

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 72.



which characterize them. That such activities are wanted then, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for their being justified as worth-while. It seems clear that there are many things which a person may want that we would not wish to designate as being worth-while. Yet, at the same time, if something is worth-while, it will also be wanted, at least by those who understand it thoroughly. The issue at stake, as Peters sees it, is not the fact of wanting but the quality of what is wanted which is crucial to identifying worth-while activities. The same may be said for attempts to characterize worth-while activities by reference to the pleasure and satisfaction which they bring. Many pleasurable activities are trivial and even undesirable. In addition, the pleasure producing features of such activities differ from one activity to the next and one is left once again with the task of identifying the character of these activities which are considered pleasurable. References to such notions as pleasure, happiness and satisfaction are not sufficient to establish activities as worth-while, but they, like wanting are necessary:

. . . for to say that such activities are indulged in for the pleasure or satisfaction which they afford is, at least, to put them in the class of activities that are pursued for their own sake. It is to class them as intrinsically and not just as instrumentally desirable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 75.





There is a further feature about the notion of pleasure and pain which is important to Peters' position. He argues that the notion of a reason for action would be almost unintelligible without some reference to the pleasurable state of affairs an action was designed to bring about or the painful state of affairs it was designed to avoid. Peters claims that the concept of "reasons for action" is learnt *pari passu* with that of "pleasure" and "pain". For "wants" emerge from "wishes" when children begin to grasp that means can be taken to bring about or avoid such pleasurable or painful conditions.<sup>1</sup> It is only on this basis that one can account for the reasons why anyone would seek one state of affairs in preference to another. However, that worth-while activities belong to the general class which we call pleasures is necessary but not sufficient condition to establish that curriculum activities are more worth-while than other pleasurable activities.

Peters develops his position further by reference to the general nature of activities and their justification. Activities are said to involve rules and standards and usually have some kind of point to them. In addition an activity must go on for a time and also involve some kind of skill and effort. While activities may be more or less interesting, more or less absorbing, the development of rules and conventions

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 76.



which dictate the manner in which these activities are performed, generates an additional source of pleasure and interest associated with the joy in mastery which quite transcends purely utilitarian considerations.

It is in this sense that activities like science and art have characteristics in common with games. They are disinterested activities, they are governed by rules and conventions, and they are pursued for their intrinsic value beyond utilitarian purposes. It is at this point that Peters introduces what he later identifies as the transcendental argument for the justification of curriculum activities. In discussing the argument from function he says:

Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Spinoza who have attempted to justify this form of life (the life of theorizing) have usually had recourse to the doctrine of function. Man's differentia, they have argued, consists in his use of reason. The good of everything in nature consists in developing that which it does better than other species or that which it alone does. Therefore, man's good must be to indulge in those activities which involve the use of reason.<sup>1</sup>

While this argument possesses the defects of all naturalistic positions, it also rests on the value position that man ought to develop that in which he differs from other species and Peters asks, "How could this principle be justified?"<sup>2</sup> While Peters rejects the argument from function he does sug-

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



gest that its emphasis upon an appeal to man's use of reason in justifying the good life, has a certain significance. For Peters, however, the proper use of this argument is as the starting point for a transcendental argument which is designed to illucidate what it is that a person is committed to, "who makes use of his reason in attempting to answer the question 'What ought I to do?'"<sup>1</sup> Later, the question is posed more appropriately for his argument as, "Why do this rather than that?" and he proceeds to describe the conditions which anyone must satisfy who seriously asks this question with a disinterested and detached attitude. These conditions may be summarized as (1) that the activity must be "capable of holding a person's attention for a certain span of time", (2) the activity should "provide constant sources of pleasure and satisfaction" through the opportunity it affords for the use of skill and sensitivity, (3) the activity should be mutually compatible with other activities "which may be equally worthwhile."<sup>2</sup>

So far however, as Peters himself admits, no argument has been provided which demonstrates that the pursuit of science or art is any more worth-while than playing games such as golf or bingo. Peters then proceeds to present arguments which illustrate the manner in which curriculum activ-

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 82.



ities such as science and art are said to differ from games like bingo and bridge, and by virtue of which they may be said to be more worth-while. Curriculum activities, it is said, have a certain cognitive concern which is not integral to games and pastimes. This is not to say that games do not have educational value, but to the degree that games are looked upon as exercises in morality, aesthetic grace, and understanding others they cease to be merely games. In addition, curriculum activities are "serious" in that they contribute to other areas of understanding and to the quality of living, by virtue of a "wide-ranging cognitive content which distinguishes them from games."<sup>1</sup> Games, for example, are mostly a matter of "knowing how" rather than "knowing that"; they require "knack" rather than understanding and such knowledge as might be involved in games throw little light on anything else.

Curriculum activities on the other hand are said to involve an indefinite amount of knowledge and can widen and deepen a person's view of innumerable other things. Thus activities like science, history and philosophy acquire a seriousness which games do not have. Such activities are serious because their cognitive concern and far-ranging cognitive content allow them to aid in explaining, assessing and illuminating different aspects of life; they

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 85.





"transform" the individual's view of the world, by way of the distinctive conceptual schemes and forms of appraisal intrinsic to them.

The stage is now set for Peters to explicate the transcendental argument he alluded to previously. Having distinguished activities like science and poetry from less serious pursuits like games and pastimes he proceeds to demonstrate why a person who seriously asks the question "Why do this rather than that?" must be more committed to activities which possess this special kind of cognitive concern and content. The answer is almost embarrassingly simple. For all these activities in their different ways are relevant to answering the question itself. For the question involves a concern with the nature and quality of the possible activities which are available, and in the process of attempting to answer the question the person is providing further substance and support to Peters' conclusion. This point is described in the following way:

In so far . . . as a person seriously asks the question 'Why do this rather than that?' he can only answer it by trying this and that and by thinking about what it is that he is doing in various ways which are inseparable from the doing of it. When he stands back and reflects about what it is that he is doing he then engages in the sorts of activities of which the curriculum of a university is largely constructed. He will find himself embarking upon those forms of inquiry such as science, history, literature and philosophy which are concerned with the description, explanation and assessment of different forms of human activities. It would be irrational for a person who seriously asks himself the question



'Why do this rather than that?' to close his mind arbitrarily to any form of inquiry which might throw light on the question which he is asking.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, curriculum activities are more worth-while by virtue of the fact that they involve the kind of activities necessary to answer the question "Why do this rather than that?" But such an argument seems to smack of instrumentality and Peters was at considerable pains earlier to distinguish worth-while activities as possessing intrinsic value; as being pursued for their own sake rather than for some instrumental end or purpose. The answer, says Peters, is that the notion of instrumentality is not entirely appropriate within this context. For curriculum subjects like science and history are not only involved in answering the question, they are also built into the asking of the question as well. Thinking scientifically, says Peters, is not exactly instrumental to answering the question "Why do this rather than that?" for it transforms the question by altering how the "this" and the "that" are perceived. Worth-while activities exhibit this feature because they possess a "seriousness" of a sort which is different to that which was previously used to distinguish between theoretical activities and games. This particular type of seriousness is characterized by the individual's recognition of his own mortality as a man. For, "in so far as he can stand back from his life and ask the question 'Why do this rather than

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 88.



that?' he must already have a serious concern for truth built into his consciousness."<sup>1</sup> For to ask a serious practical question of this sort implies that a man also wants to come to understand the context in which the question is asked and to acquire the knowledge which provides the "framework for possible answers."<sup>2</sup> To ask the question seriously then is to commit oneself to those theoretical activities which give context to the question itself.

The criteria which Peters claims to have established for identifying worth-while activities may be summarized as follows. (1) They are pursued for their own sake. (2) They are wanted. (3) They are the source at some time of pleasure and satisfaction. (4) They are disinterested activities. (5) They are capable of holding a person's attention for a certain span of time. (6) Their complexity involves the use of skill which is an additional source of satisfaction. (7) They are mutually compatible with other equally worth-while activities. (8) They are characterized by a seriousness through which they contribute to other areas of understanding and to the quality of life. They are said to transform the individual's view of the world through their conceptual schemes and forms of appraisal. (9) They involve a cognitive concern and far-ranging content which is necessary to answer the question "Why do this rather than that?" (10) They not only provide an op-

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.





portunity for understanding the context in which the question "Why do this rather than that?" is asked, but they also imply a serious concern for truth on the part of the person asking the question.

Several points need to be mentioned in relation to Peters' views and the function of the criteria he has described. The criteria are said to describe a general class of activities which are considered worth-while. They provide a justification for the inclusion of activities like science, history, literature, and mathematics in the curriculum rather than bingo and bridge. They do not imply that there are equally good reasons for saying that some curriculum activities are more worth-while than other activities which are also included in the curriculum. The criteria merely show that there are good reasons for pursuing these activities rather than others. The degree to which an activity satisfies these criteria will indicate the degree to which it may be considered worth-while. But the criteria themselves, Peters says, are highly general and "there are countless activities which satisfy them."<sup>1</sup> Peters believes that the criteria indicate a class of activities which seem qualitatively superior to others but by themselves they do

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<sup>1</sup>R. S. Peters, "In Defence of Bingo: A Rejoinder," in Philosophical Essays on Teaching, ed. by Bertram Bandman and Robert S. Guttchen (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), p. 318.



not indicate that there are some activities within this class which can be considered more worth-while than others which also fall in this class. Clearly, there are some activities which will more fully satisfy the criteria than other activities. But their worth-whileness, Peters states, "is to be asserted with an other things being equal clause."<sup>1</sup> They have a prima facie status. As Peters suggests,

Just because some activities -- e.g. cookery -- have less cognitive content than others -- e.g. science -- this does not mean that they have no value at all. Indeed, it is obvious from my account that I think some games have considerable value -- perhaps even Bingo. But that should not blind us to the fact that other activities, because they satisfy more of the criteria, have more value.<sup>2</sup>

For worth-while activities must be "cut according to the cloth of individual aptitude and capacity."<sup>3</sup> Precisely the form these activities will take depends upon other factors such as need, interest, aptitude and capacity. But the activities of a child's curriculum at any one stage of development will be chosen from that general class of worth-while activities characterized by the criteria Peters has described. The rationale for selecting between activities which fall within that general class, must be found elsewhere .

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, "In Defence of Bingo: A Rejoinder," p. 319.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



It must be remembered that within the context of Peters' view of the educational concept, initiation into worth-while activities is a distinguishing feature of what it means to be an educated man. From this point of view activities like science and history may be more directly related to the concept of education than, say, driver education or cookery or athletics. Peters does not wish to deny that activities of this latter kind have no educational value, only that what value they do have must be argued for on separate grounds. Any attempt to justify the inclusion of driver education and athletics in the curriculum will, however, involve the sort of activities which are characterized by Peters as worth-while. Hence, the force of his transcendental argument is particularly powerful and seems quite unassailable. For if one wished to propose a counter attack on Peters' position presumably this would involve an attempt to justify that driver education and athletics were superior activities to science and literature. In the course of such an attempt at justification, however, one could not avoid adding further support to Peters' transcendental argument. It seems inevitable then that worth-while activities must be central to all attempts at educating the young. In addition, it seems reasonable to assume that some activities are more central to this process than others according to the degree to which they exhibit cognitive concern, a far-ranging cognitive content and not only involve



activities necessary to answer the question "Why do this rather than that?" but also provide the context in which the question is asked. For to ask the question involves a serious concern for truth, which is a value presupposed in all serious efforts at justification.

Peters' position has been questioned by P. S. Wilson and in particular his transcendental argument has been criticized on the grounds that it amounts to saying "curriculum activities are worth-while because unless they are worth-while, I would not expect to be able to justify my contention that they are worth-while".<sup>1</sup> Wilson's claim is that there is no real basis for maintaining that I need necessarily contend that they are worth-while in the first place. He says:

For some people, at some times, done in certain ways, yes; but I do not contend that they are worth-while in any other sense than that in which I contend that Bingo, for example, could be worth-while (though no doubt to a more limited extent) . . . sometimes Bingo is worth-while; and unless it were sometimes worth-while, I would not expect to be able to justify my contention that sometimes it is worth-while. If this form of argument justifies some current curriculum activities (as I think it does), then it justifies Bingo or any other activity which anyone at all . . . is "seriously" prepared to contend is worth-while. Who am I to stand in judgement over the "seriousness" of anyone else's contentions? I may have an opinion on the matter, but it is just an opinion. There is nothing transcendental about it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>P. S. Wilson, "In Defence of Bingo," in Philosophical Essays on Teaching, ed. by Bertram Bandman and Robert S. Guttchen (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), p. 298.

<sup>2</sup>Wilson, "In Defence of Bingo," p. 298.





Peters suggests that this criticism is based on three connected misunderstandings. Firstly, Peters declares that his argument is not meant to be an appeal to the opinions of any particular person involved in any particular activity. It has nothing to do with personal preferences but is rather an attempt to get behind a form of discourse concerned with the question, "Why do this rather than that?", and as such it is an attempt to expose public presuppositions. Secondly, Peters maintains that Wilson's remarks fail to take account of the importance of thought in curriculum activities. Science and mathematics, for example, involve forms of thought which, while they may be distinctive and separate, nevertheless form the foundations for any attempt at justification. Peters declares:

. . . there is an oddity in a person being seriously committed to justification if he is not also committed to avail himself of the various forms of thinking which provide the preconditions for thinking seriously about anything.<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, the substance of Peters' argument is concerned with practical thought involved in attempts to answer questions about what to do. Such attempts, as we have seen, involve a commitment to various presuppositions including a concern for truth which determine the manner whereby one views the various possibilities involved. Activities like science and history clearly involve ways of discriminating between this

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, "In Defence of Bingo: A Rejoinder," p. 317.



and that and have an intimate relationship with justification in a way that puts them in a quite different category from Bingo and Bridge.

I think it is possible to accept Peters' reply to the criticism which Wilson has raised, however it would seem that the first point is in need of some further discussion. As I understand it, Wilson is declaring that before one can apply Peters' argument he must first have a view about what is worth-while, and Peters' argument gains force when he attempts to justify his view that a particular activity is more worth-while than another. Curriculum activities then, have to be proposed as more worth-while than Bingo, and Peters' argument used to justify this claim. But what if I was to claim that Bingo was more worth-while? Could I not use the argument to say that Bingo must be worth-while because if it was not worth-while, I would not be able to justify my contention that it is worth-while. However, Wilson appears to ignore the fact that Peters' argument is designed to justify activities like science and history with respect to other activities like Bingo. In other words, it is not just a matter of justifying a particular activity, but justifying it in respect to other activities. Of course, anyone at anytime can seriously contend that almost anything is worth-while and Peters would not wish to deny this. In fact, he states:



It does not matter to me whether one person finds Bingo worth while whereas another person values science. What matters to me is what a person must value who asks seriously whether he shall spend his time doing science or playing Bingo.<sup>1</sup>

The force of Peters' transcendental argument becomes clearer when one asks in reply to Wilson's criticism. "How is Bingo related or associated with the activity of justification?" Certainly one may claim that games like Bingo and Bridge may be worth-while under certain circumstances. But one could not justify them as being superior to activities like science and history which involve types of inquiry in which justification is articulated.

Peters' argument then in an attempt to justify activities such as science and history as being worth-while. His criteria serve to identify a general class of activities which establish them as superior in worth to other activities such as Bingo and Bridge. In brief, Peters' argument establishes that activities like science, art, and history are worth passing on to young people; worth initiating them into. However, his argument does not indicate which among these worth-while activities one ought to select in order to pass them on to young people. While it is possible to justify activities such as science and art as being more worthy

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, "In Defence of Bingo: A Rejoinder," p. 317.





as educational pursuits than Bingo and Bridge, one cannot teach all activities which are worth-while or all that is involved in them. How then can one justify a decision to teach some worth-while activities rather than others? It seems that under the terms of Peters' argument, subjects like science and mathematics have a prior claim to worth-whileness than, say, carpentry or basket-weaving, but Peters has declared that his criteria cannot serve to indicate which worth-while activities a teacher ought to be concerned to pass on to his students. It is necessary then to establish further criteria which will allow one to choose between one worth-while activity and another. While this involves establishing additional criteria for selecting curriculum content it also involves a further discussion of the nature of justification. The next chapter will consider ways in which one can justify the selection of one worth-while activity in preference to another.



### CHAPTER III

#### JUSTIFYING THE SELECTION OF CURRICULUM CONTENT

While it may be possible to justify a certain class of activities as being worth-while teaching to students it seems clear that one must decide which activities amongst this class ought to be taught. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the range of activities which may qualify as being worth-while is so large that the choice of which among them to teach must be decided on other grounds. Neither would we want to leave such a serious matter to personal taste or whim, for we generally consider that the selection of curriculum content is a responsible matter which can be rationally justified.

Scheffler<sup>1</sup> maintains that the notion of justification can only apply to controllable acts or moves, which also imply the notion of responsibility. If an act was not within a person's control he cannot be held responsible for it. Like Peters, Scheffler also seems disposed toward ana-

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<sup>1</sup>Israel Scheffler, "Justifying Curriculum Decisions," in Philosophical Essays on Teaching ed. by Bertram Bandman and Robert S. Guttchen (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), pp. 260-268.



logies involving games, in this case chess. For a player to justify his move as a chess move he must show that it conforms to rules which define the game of chess. Moves of this kind cannot be justified in general but are always relative to the set of operative rules governing the context in which they are made, as for example, driving on the right hand side of the road in North America is justified because such a move conforms to the traffic rules which apply in that context. But that does not mean that such a move is unique or superior to other rules in a different context as, for example, in England where the traffic rules oblige that one drive on the left hand side of the road. Hence, such justification is only relative to the set of rules which govern a move in that context.

There is, however, a further form of justification which Scheffler describes. This is the general form of justification involved when a person asks not merely what moves ought to be made in order to comply with a particular set of rules but rather what move ought to be made at all. For example, it seems often the case in educational issues that one is not necessarily concerned with what jibes with current practice but rather what is generally justified. In order to justify a move in this general sense it is not sufficient to defend it on the basis of its conformity with local practice, but the grounds upon which the local practice



rests are also brought into question. In other words, one attempts to justify the rules with which the initial move was said to conform. Here, one can see that if one appealed to a further set of rules then the chain of justification becomes endless, and one becomes involved in an infinite regress. Scheffler maintains that this general sense of justification must involve "initial commitments". That is a commitment to a certain set of moves which "on the whole" command our greatest confidence and in which we have the highest credibility. In justifying a move in general, we appeal to those rules which govern, "those families of moves that, as wholes, command our acceptance to the highest degree."<sup>1</sup> Without these "initial commitments" Scheffler maintains that justification would not be possible in the general sense. For example:

Our legal and moral rules serve, indeed, to guide the making of particular moves, but their guidance depends of their presumed adequacy in codifying<sup>2</sup> our initial commitments to moves, on the whole.

It would seem that justification in the general sense is more desirable when making educational decisions, principally because relative justification always leaves one exposed to the charge that the rules governing the moves are themselves unjustified. This is not to say that relative justification

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<sup>1</sup>Scheffler, "Justifying Curriculum Decisions," p. 265.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 265.





is an easy or expedient means of justifying a move (although in many cases this may be the motive) since as Scheffler indicates there is a whole profession (the legal profession) devoted to this difficult task of deciding the conformity of cases to rule.

Scheffler maintains that rules we appeal to in justifying the selection of curriculum content are empirically based. He tentatively proposes a set of rules governing the selection of content which he adds ought to be constructed as tentative hypotheses inviting criticism. The guiding principles underlying these rules, he says, is that the content is to help the learner attain maximum self-sufficiency as economically as possible. Firstly, content should be economical in regard to teaching effort and resources. Secondly, content should be economical with regard to the effort required by the learner. Thirdly, subject matter itself should be economical in that it should have maximum generalizability or transfer value. Such generalizability may be of two kinds. It may either facilitate other learning or it may logically apply to a wide range of problems. This latter rule is presumably the one by which we justify teaching physics rather than meteorology and chemistry rather than rocketry. Like Peters, Scheffler also applies an "other things being equal" condition to these rules. For example, a teacher may disregard



economy in preference for the development of perseverance and persistence. But other things being equal, it would seem that there is little positive value to be gained from making tasks unnecessarily difficult for the learner.

The rules of self-sufficiency seem less clear on Scheffler's account of them. Rules of self sufficiency seem to have as their general basis the development in the learner of the capacity to make "responsible personal and moral decisions". This involves the development of certain character traits and habits of mind which Scheffler describes in the following way:

Self-awareness, imaginative weighing of alternative courses of action, understanding of other people's choices and ways of life, decisiveness without rigidity, emancipation from stereo-typed ways of thinking and perceiving--all these are bound up with the goal of personal and moral self-sufficiency.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, such qualities require reliable knowledge which not only illumines the social background against which choices of career and ideology are made, but also assist in widening the range of alternatives available and indicate the particular consequences which may follow from different courses of action.

Further to the development of self-sufficiency is the need to impart the technical or instrumental skills which

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<sup>1</sup>Scheffler, "Justifying Curriculum Decisions," p. 268.



will allow the student to carry out his decisions. Such skills involve "critical ability, personal security, and independent powers of judgement in the light of evidence."<sup>1</sup> An emphasis upon such skills, Scheffler states, provide a useful counterbalance to emphasis upon the child's interests since "subjects unsupported by student interest may yet have high instrumental value for the students themselves."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is the notion of intellectual power involved in self-sufficiency. Theoretical sophistication is needed on the one hand to provide for the development of the ability to appraise and formulate arguments in various domains, and on the other hand, to provide an acquaintance with basic information as well as different modes of experience and perception. Scheffler comments:

The danger here, a serious risk of general education programs, is that of superficiality. But ignorance is also a danger. How to avoid both ignorance and superficiality is the basic practical problem. I should hazard the opinion that the solution lies not in rapid survey courses but in the intensive cultivation of a small but significant variety of areas.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part the criteria which Scheffler describes are generally accepted as the basis for the application of the findings of educational psychology and information

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<sup>1</sup>Scheffler, "Justifying Curriculum Decisions," p. 268.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



about the learning process to educational activities. In addition the work of those concerned with analysing the structure of various subject disciplines has done much to identify those logically central features of a subject matter which have maximum generalizability.<sup>1</sup>

Scheffler's criteria appear to be generally acceptable and, on the whole, justifiable, for we are initially committed in education to moves of the sort he describes. It is the notion of self-sufficiency, however, which seems to require further clarification. Central to this idea seems to be the making of responsible personal and moral decisions. The problem here is to identify what the characteristics might be of a responsible moral decision, for in the field of moral values it is well known that in many instances in practice "one man's meat is another man's poison." While one might agree with Scheffler that the task of relating such characteristics as self-awareness, imaginative weighing of evidence and alternative courses of action, decisiveness without rigidity, etc., to school subjects, is an empirical problem, it would nevertheless seem strategically important to identify just what it is that characterizes a responsible personal and moral decision. It seems doubtful that Scheffler would believe that the possession of

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<sup>1</sup>For an example of various analyses of the logically central features of several subjects, see The Structure of Knowledge and the Curriculum, ed. by G. W. Ford and Lawrence Pugno (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1964).





these qualities in themselves assure responsible personal and moral decision making, so it would appear that he had something else in mind. But it is difficult to discover from his account what it could be, except that perhaps he believes that all that is necessary to make responsible moral decisions is the development of rationality. One can only remark that the most educated nation in the world, with more professors to the square mile than any other country, elected Adolf Hitler to power. It is not to be denied, however, that the qualities, habits of mind and technical skills which Scheffler mentions are not unhelpful in making responsible personal and moral decisions but by themselves they are not sufficient. Indeed, it does not seem improbable that all the qualities, habits of mind, etc., which he mentions might be responsibly used in the attainment of any end whatsoever, moral or immoral. The important element which Scheffler ignores is that reliable knowledge, independent judgement, technical skill, etc., may be directed toward ends which may have nothing whatsoever to do with human welfare. Hitler, for example, and most of the German people, for that matter, believed they were doing the world a moral service by ridding it of the Jewish race.

It seems that responsible personal and moral decisions are not just a matter of rational skill, understanding and knowledge. There is an important element of humanism and



moral sensitivity which needs to be included before one can even suspect that the qualities which Scheffler mentions will be employed in making responsible personal and moral decisions. It is, therefore, necessary as prior condition to the development of the qualities of self-sufficiency, to develop a passionate concern for humane as opposed to inhumane ends in human affairs and conduct. Without this feature, one might use the qualities of self-sufficiency which Scheffler describes, to murder one's wife as to keep one's promises. In short, without some consideration of the ends to which conduct is directed, without some notion of ends worth pursuing, all the logic, science and technical skill which one might acquire will not assure responsible moral acts. The making of responsible personal and moral decisions is not just a matter of reflective understanding. There must also be a positive emotional response; an emotive disposition toward the end to which the decision is directed. John Dewey described such a delicate responsiveness to conditions when he stated:

Just as the material of knowledge is supplied through the sense, so the material of ethical knowledge is supplied by emotional responsiveness. It is difficult to put this quality into words, but we all know the difference between the character which is hard and formal and the one which is sympathetic, flexible and open. In the abstract, the former may be as sincerely devoted to moral ideas as is the latter, but as a practical matter, we prefer to live with the latter. We count upon it to accomplish more by tact, by instinctive recognition of the claims of others by skill in adjusting than the former can accomplish by mere attachment to rules.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Dewey, Moral Principles in Education (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), p. 53.



It is a mistake to suggest that responsible moral decisions can be made on a strictly cognitive level without regard to the feeling components involved in moral decision making. While reason can determine questions of truth and falsity, such notions do not fit the task of moral decision making. Often situations arise in which our finer sense conflicts with what reason tells us to do, and history contains countless examples of "far far better things done" in the face of all that seemed reasonable. In short, expanded knowledge does not assure virtue, and increased understanding of the world does not mean that we will make our place in it more worth-while.<sup>1</sup> The facts of history and our own experience indicate that rational processes do not assure worthy actions. As Vandenberg states:

The difficulty of moral education arises from the attempt to discover what sort of knowing is "really knowing" so that those who know the good will, in fact, pursue it, then it is not so much a matter of epistemology or theory of knowing as it is of restoring to ethical theory insofar as it is related to instruction, the tension that was found in Plato by his accompanying the knowledge of the good with the Delphic and Socratic "know thyself" . . . Knowing the good, however, seems necessarily related to some form of knowing oneself, if one is to learn the good in such a way that it entails the pursuit of the good, if it is to entail being good, because

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<sup>1</sup>For a fuller statement of the view that knowledge and understanding acquired through education do not assure a qualitative improvement in the world, see "The Ago of Oversave: Some Remarks on the Evangelical School," Thomas E. Spencer, Educational Theory, XIX (Fall, 1969), 404-409.



of the "irrational" or "depth" components of human being.<sup>1</sup>

It seems necessary then, to add to Scheffler's rules of "self-sufficiency" that curriculum content should contribute to the development of an emotional responsiveness which in turn disposes the individual positively toward humane ends and consideration for human welfare in general as the over-riding moral principle. The subject content which contributes to the development of these qualities is, of course, an empirical problem, but one is inclined to agree with Scheffler when he states that it is extremely unlikely that a solution is to be found in the mechanical correlation of each subject to a desired trait. It seems that a variety of subjects will contribute to this development in a variety of ways, but in particular subjects like art, drama, music, and literature provide greater opportunities for personal emotional responsiveness and emotional sensitivity which seem to be associated with a concern for humanistic ends.

In summary, while Scheffler's underlying principles, of maximum self-sufficiency and economy seem in general to be justifiable and appropriate criteria in the selection of curriculum content, further consideration needs to be given towards the development of responsible moral decision making.

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Vandenberg, "On the Ground of Education", Educational Theory, XVII (January, 1967), p. 63.





Other things being equal, however, the rules he describes would seem to stand, with the addition that self-sufficiency must also involve the development of emotional responsiveness, sensitivity, and a disposition toward humane ends in human affairs.

But it is obvious that "all other things" are seldom "equal" and it is most often the case that in selecting curriculum content in addition to the factors which have been already mentioned, student "interests" and "needs" are mentioned and given some considerable importance in the scheme of things. To what degree ought these "interests" and "needs" be taken into account in selecting curriculum content and how can they be justified? This is the subject of the next two chapters.



## CHAPTER IV

### STUDENT INTERESTS

One of the most common criticisms of contemporary education from people both within the field and without, is that education fails to take account of student interests in selecting curriculum content. Some subjects are criticized by students on the basis that they are of little interest to them. Other subjects are criticized by parents because they are not in their child's interests. However, it is often not at all clear what is meant by such claims or what it is that should be taken into account when deciding what should be included in the curriculum. When statements such as "Schools should cater to student interests" are made, does this mean that anything the student is interested in should be taught? Does it imply that things in which the student shows no interest ought to be dropped from the school curriculum? If we accept the arguments provided in the previous chapters, then student interests will represent one of the features of the school situation which will be taken into account when the *ceteris paribus* clause does not apply.

The adjustments and modifications to curriculum



content which might result from a consideration of student interests will be made from within that general class of activities which are worth-while and, in addition, within that further range of activities which can be justified in general as being economical in contributing to the development of self-sufficiency.

Peters<sup>1</sup> gives an analysis of three senses of the concept "interest" which are relevant for education. The first is the psychological sense which we use when we refer to someone being interested in something or disposed to attend to or take notice of. This is the sense of interest which is intended when educators refer to the notion that the learning process is more easily facilitated by the learner's interest. In other words, if the learner is interested in the material he will likely learn the material more effectively. However, it should be obvious that it is not only practically impossible, but often undesirable, that everything which a student is interested in, should be included in the school curriculum. The notion of interest may serve a useful purpose in aiding the economy of the learning process, but by itself it does not necessarily indicate what the student ought to pursue.

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<sup>1</sup>R. S. Peters, Ethics and Education, Chapter V.



For while the student may be interested in something, its pursuit may not be in his interest. A person may be interested in safecracking, but that fact neither makes the activity worth-while nor in the person's interest to pursue it. This introduces the second sense in which "interest" is used. When we speak of something being in a person's interest the notion is used in a normative sense by implying that the activity is not only worth-while but appropriate for him in some way. Peters maintains that when educators speak of being concerned with the interests of children this is the sense which is usually implied, rather than merely what children are interested in. Peters declares that teachers are therefore concerned with:

. . . ensuring that they (children) pursue what is both worth-while and suitable for them, i.e., beneficial for them. He, therefore, has to consider not only what the potentialities and capacities are of the particular children for whom he is responsible.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore a judgement about what is in a person's interest will involve instrumental considerations designed to promote an end which is desirable. For example, a teacher seeking a particular position may decide that it is in his interest to shave off his beard. But not all judgements about what is in a person's interest are entirely relative to individual

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 92.





cases. They can apply to anyone regardless of his particular interests. For instance, it is generally assumed that the impairment of the faculties, or pain, disease and insecurity in general serve no individual's interest, while preservation and maintenance of health does. For these general conditions will maximize the individual's opportunity to pursue his particular interests. Drawing on an argument presented by Hobbes, Peters refutes the notion that judgements about what is in a person's interests are instrumental judgements related to the actual wants or psychological interests of people. This argument is particularly significant in view of the fact that in educational discourse often little attempt is made to distinguish between what is in a person's interest and what he is interested in. Contrary to Peters belief, in many cases, when educators refer to students' interests in relation to the curriculum it is often assumed that what a student is interested in is also in his interest to pursue. Such would not seem to be the case, however, if we consider the notion that placing people under constant threat of death, for example, will enhance their pursuit of good activities. It could be argued, therefore, that it is in every man's interest to be constantly threatened by death. This illustrates the point that what is in a person's interest cannot be relative to what he wants or happens to be interested in. For the claim is based on the assumption that what he actually wants is not worth-while, therefore



the threat of death is necessary in order to enhance his pursuit of worth-while activities. The removal of this threat would, therefore, allow him to pursue what he really wants, but unfortunately he wants to do other less worth-while things. This seems a particularly effective argument for refuting the idea that children ought to be able to pursue whatever they are interested in without restriction or that the curriculum ought to be geared principally to children's psychological interests without any consideration of what is in their interests in the normative sense. Of course, it may be the case that, happily, the two will coincide and that what a student is interested in will also be in his interests to pursue, but the connection is a contingent one and not one of logical entailment. For as Peters indicates:

... though we think it regrettable that some people cannot get what they want, we also think it regrettable that other people want just what they get. In other words, judgements are passed on people's wants in deciding what is in their interest.<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that the notion of children's interests in the psychological sense is most closely related to the rules of economy outlined in the previous chapter. But then only within the sphere of what is considered worth-while being pursued. It may be necessary here, however, to add another *ceteris paribus* clause, for one can imagine a situation in which a student is interested in euclidean geometry and it is

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<sup>1</sup>Peters, Ethics and Education, p. 94.



considered a worth-while activity, but not economical at the time because he did not have the necessary prior knowledge to undertake the pursuit of euclidean geometry with any real effectiveness. In other words, it is not in the student's interest, at the time, to undertake euclidean geometry until he has first acquired the knowledge and understanding which ensures a more economical use of his time and effort.

In general then, it does not necessarily follow that what a person is interested in is also in his interests to pursue. The normative sense of interest would seem to apply in general to educational activities, for it combines what is both worth-while and appropriate to children's understanding, knowledge and ability.

The third sense in which the concept of "interest" applies to education is that contained in the idea of "public interest", which may either be used in the sense of having regard for a larger sphere of interest than may apply to one's own group and, secondly, it may be used to indicate the promotion of policies which are in every man's interest such as the provision of food, health and transport facilities, etc. In both senses the school is obviously concerned, for in training technicians, skilled workers and professionals, it contributes to the economy of the nation which is in the "public interest".



A further question remains however, for accepting the fact that judgements are passed on what is in a person's interest, what reason have we for promoting his interests rather than our own? Under certain conditions, it seems that the pursuit of worth-while activities may sometimes be undertaken at the expense of others. The question is "Why should I consider the interests of others?" Peters' answer to this dilemma is that in seriously posing the question "Why do this rather than that?" one is engaged in public discourse. For if people who asked the question never thought that their desire to engage in worth-while activities would be considered by other men, then the activity would lack any point and, as such, would never get off the ground. Why engage in such a discussion if one is to be denied the opportunity of pursuing such worth-while activities? A consideration of the interests of others is, therefore, said to be a pre-condition for asking the question in the first place. There are several difficulties with this argument, however, which are in need of further discussion.

Firstly, it is not altogether clear that the question is necessarily conducted in public discourse except in the sense that the language in which it is conducted is public. For there is no obligation to reveal the form of the discourse to others. Could not the question "Why do this rather than that?" be undertaken privately? And secondly,





if this is so, having decided upon a worth-while activity as the solution to this question, could one not then actively pursue this activity regardless of the interests of others? Certainly, it would be made easier if one attempted to avoid conflicts of interest whenever possible, but one may decide that he can win the conflict in his own interests and dominate the other such that his own interests hold full sway. Surely the fact that the interests of other people creates an obstacle to achieving a state of affairs which is in my own interest, does not thereby oblige me to consider the interests of other? The answer which Peters provides, namely that a consideration of the interests of others is an essential aspect in the achievement of a state of affairs which will allow me to pursue what is in my interests to pursue, seems reasonable and meaningful. But his argument for this conclusion is based on the faulty hypothesis that men will generally avoid situations where the interests of others conflict with their own.

In brief then, the fact that the pursuit of my own interests is made more difficult by the interests of others which may conflict with my own, does not thereby oblige me to consider their interests. I may selfishly judge that I can assert what is in my interest to pursue and ignore the interests of those who may interfere. A consideration of the interests of others does not then necessarily follow from asking the question "Why do this rather than that?" The



answer to the problem of considering the interests of others must lie elsewhere in the development of a personal moral commitment to the notion of considering others' interests as well as one's own. It seems that in this respect Sartre's notion of "mutual reciprocity" presents a more viable and convincing position.

Sartre<sup>1</sup> claims that as soon as one submits to membership in a group or community there is a reciprocal understanding which makes a claim on each member of the group, which amounts to an undertaking to limit one's own liberty in order that the interests of all members of the group or community may be served. In other words, by accepting membership in a group, I thereby undertake to limit the pursuit of my own interests in recognition that other people have rights to pursue their interests. In order that I may be able to count on other members of the group, they in turn must be able to count on me. They can be expected to respect limitations on what they may legitimately do, only if I, in turn, honour their claim to a similar limitation on me. Sartre claims that the basis of human relations within this context of self-imposed obligations which individuals recognise toward each other, represents "the beginning of humanity." This argument has the advantage of imposing on the individual, obligations

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique de la Raison dialectique (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).



to consider the interests of other people by virtue of his own free choice to belong to the group in the first place. Under Peters' argument, there is no obligation to consider the interests of others except as one is committed to conflict reconciliation in the first place. Peters ignores the fact that the individual may or may not choose to consider the interests of others if he feels they are not worth-while or are in conflict with his own interests. He is, in fact, free either to deny their importance for his own pursuits or attempt to overcome their efforts in preference for his own. The only way in which one can resolve the possibility that individuals may pursue quite selfish ends at the expense of other people's interests, is to place a further obligation upon them by virtue of their membership in a group or community. If they do not wish to commit themselves to this mutual reciprocity, which is at the base of human community, then they may establish another group which represents interests in accord with their own. Such choice depends on each individual's perception of what is in his interests to do. But to say, as Peters does, that asking the question "Why do this rather than that?" presupposes this commitment to a community, seems unjustified. Even if men thought that no consideration was going to be given to their desire to engage in such activities, this would not prevent them asking the question with a view to



either attempting to resolve the conflict of interests which the answer may present, or else trying to dominate others such that one's own interests gain supremacy. The basis for mutual reciprocity between the interests of individuals would seem to lie more convincingly in their initial commitment to the human community.

Given that without this commitment to the human community, conflict of interests is always present and that even when this commitment is present the reconciliation of competing interests is not thereby resolved, Peters' argument seems inadequate. For the possibility of resolution is at least presented through the recognition of reciprocal rights and obligations which not only serve individuals within the community but also preserve the basis on which the community is founded. In the larger sphere of course this commitment is to the human community in general and not just to national or local groups. For it is dogmatic attachment to the latter which bring smaller social and national groups into conflict, to the detriment of the interests of the human community in general.

In regard to the consideration of interests then, it would seem that the school should cultivate an initial commitment to the human community in general in preference to narrow national or group interests. One is inclined to





believe with Bertrand Russell that the notion of Patriotism, for example, far from being taught in schools, ought to be mentioned as "a form of mass-hysteria to which men are unfortunately liable, and against which they need to be fortified both intellectually and morally."<sup>1</sup> This is most appropriately the role of a scheme of moral education within the curriculum, but the over-riding principle in such a scheme must be the consideration of the wider interests of the human community.

In summary, the concept of "interests" has a number of applications to the selection of subject matter in education. The question of a child's interest in the psychological sense is more closely related to the rules of economy in learning and teaching. The notion of what is in a child's interest to pursue, however, is a separate issue which may or may not coincide with what a child is interested in. The important point is that what a child may be interested in is not always in his interests to pursue. The connection is not one of logical entailment but is always contingent upon a judgement as to the worth of the object of interest. In other words, judgements are made on what is worth pursuing and it is on this basis that one decides what is in the person's interest to pursue. Here, other considerations may apply such as the capacity of the individual, his potentiality, his needs and his development level. But applying the

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<sup>1</sup>Bertrand Russell, Education and the Modern World (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1932), p. 134.



ceteris paribus clause, in general it may be said that activities which a child is interested in and which are also in his interests to pursue are chosen from that class of activities considered worth-while and which can be justified on the basis of the rules of economy and self-sufficiency.

In addition, there are considerations in relation to the public interest and to the interests of the human community. It has been suggested that consideration of the interests of others is necessarily founded on an initial commitment to the human community which imposes reciprocal rights and obligations on all members to the benefit of the community as a whole. Any scheme of moral education must reflect this principle rather than narrower national or group interests.



## CHAPTER V

### STUDENT NEEDS

Much of what has been discussed in relation to "interests" also applied to student "needs" as a consideration in the process of selecting curriculum content. The concept of "need" however differs from "interests" in some significant respects. Archambault<sup>1</sup> indicates that the notion of "needs" may be understood in several ways. A major function is in its use in referring to an organic state of deficiency as in the case of a nutritional deficiency where there is a need to maintain homeostasis or equilibrium of normal functioning. On the other hand, "needs" may refer to motives or drives as in the case of it being said that a child needs affection, meaning that he wants or desires affection, or that "he needs to go fishing" meaning that he wants to go fishing. The distinction between need as a deficiency and need as a motive

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<sup>1</sup>Reginald D. Archambault, "The Concept of Need," in Readings in the Philosophy of Education, ed. by John Martin Rich (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1966), pp. 286-311.



or drive is not always clear but in general we may distinguish between the two on the basis that a "motive expression is used in a situation where some subject is actively pursuing a goal."<sup>1</sup>

Archambault points out, however, that there are several other difficulties associated with the use of need in educational discourse. He suggests that if the concept of need is to have any value as a determinant of educational policy, it must denote "a definite objective lack of the organism which must be satisfied if the organism is to survive and prosper in a healthy and harmonious manner."<sup>2</sup> A further distinction is contained in the difference between the needs of the individual and the needs of society. Implied in this distinction is that individual needs regardless of whether they are meant in terms of a lack or in terms of a motive, must be separated from the conditions thought to be necessary to preserve the equilibrium of a society. There is the implicit assumption often that individual needs ought to be discovered, nurtured or created in the light of what a society considers it needs in order to maintain a pre-established optimum standard of equilibrium or balance. Exactly what conditions are considered

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<sup>1</sup>B. Paul Komisar, "'Need' and the Needs-Curriculum," in Language and Concepts in Education, ed. by B. O. Smith and R. H. Ennis (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1966), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Archambault, "The Concept of Need," p. 289.





optimum is dictated by the fundamental values to which a society may be committed. Thus, there is often a close relationship between a need in terms of a lack and value questions which indicate the optimum conditions necessary before a satisfactory state of equilibrium is attained. Without a recognition of this aspect of need it has often been assumed that a need-oriented curriculum is thereby free of subjectivity and value issues. The impact of this view has been a tendency to suppose that the discovery of the "basic" needs of students will indicate valid educational content leading to the maximum satisfaction of these needs. But considering once again the rules of economy referred to in Chapter III, we are obliged to ask which needs are to be emphasized and how can they be ordered in terms of their relative importance?

Prior to this, however, there are certain theoretical difficulties associated with the validity of the need concept. For example, in the work of some psychologists, in particular H. A. Murray<sup>1</sup> and his colleagues, need is postulated as a fundamental construct in personality theory. Murray refers to need in this way:

Between what we can directly observe--the stimulus and the resulting action--a need is an invisible link, which may be imagined to have the properties that an understanding of observed phenomena demand.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry A. Murray, Explorations in Personality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938).



"Need" is therefore a hypothetical concept.<sup>1</sup>

In fact Murray himself admits that there are no adequate reasons for hesitating to conceptualize processes behind appearance. Further, needs may be classified into general classes on the basis of their similarity, which are termed single major needs. It is then possible to refer to similar instances as manifestations of one need. Observation also shows that under similar circumstances a particular need is prone to recur, thus it is possible to talk of need as "a noun which stands for the fact that a certain trend is apt to recur."<sup>2</sup>

Allport has criticized Murray's analysis on the grounds that "universalizing needs fail to depict with exactness the special foci of organisation existing in each individual life."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the variety of need behavior and the variety of objects to which this behavior is directed is not explained by simply classifying such phenomena in terms of basic or major needs. The effect is simply to ignore existing differences and essentially unexplained phenomena by simply classifying them. In addition, it fails to account for the phenomenon of learned

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<sup>1</sup>Henry A. Murray, Explorations in Personality, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon W. Allport, Personality (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937), p. 241.



needs which result from interaction with one's socio-cultural environment. Ample evidence is available for this notion that original motivation for behavior undergoes considerable alteration in the process of development. Thus, needs cannot be explained in terms of basic categories, for a theory of needs must also take account of the individual's learning and interaction with his environment.

A further difficulty is inherent in the notion of need as lack, where it is maintained that the need is manifested by an effort on the part of the organism to achieve a state of equilibrium or "normal" functioning. This difficulty is a particular problem in theories which stress the meaning of need in terms of adjustment, socialization or cultural adaptation. Such conceptions of need are dependent upon an established norm of attainment in terms of an optimum level of adjustment. But considering the complexities of individual variations together with subtle nuances in perceptions of the situations, such objective norms are impossible to define. For the most part the notion of adjustment as a situation where a need in terms of a lack is satisfied, is closely related to societal demands and societal values. The society places certain demands upon the individual under the rubric of "proper" adjustment and also sets the standards of attainment or optimum level. For ex-



ample, the "well" adjusted Pacific Islander has considerable difficulty in exhibiting "proper" adjustment in a complex modern society. The culture, therefore, not only imposes certain demands of varying nature, but also regulates the norm of adjustment itself. These culturally derived norms also influence the individual's perception of his own needs and the standards of normality and proper adjustment to which they are directed. As Archambault states:

We must not lose sight of the fact that the relations between societal values and personal standards is reciprocal in the sense that they are mutually interdependent. Thus, culturally imposed values operate not only as an objective determinant of the individual's value structure, but in the process of imposition, affect the very perception of what values should be.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem that in many cases the notion of need is very closely related to social and individual values. This is particularly true when considering needs in terms of a deficiency or lack. Standards of attainment are ultimately dependent upon judgements which are ethical in nature rather than scientific. When needs are discussed in terms of goals or ends, they imply a conception of a state of affairs which ought to be in the light of what is possible. While an understanding of the child's motivations

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<sup>1</sup>Archambault, "The Concept of Need," p. 302.





and perceptions, etc., is necessary to ensure that meaningful and attainable goals are set, this in itself is not sufficient to establish a direction for educational provisions. The ultimate task is an ethical one in which the projected end is postulated as desirable for a variety of reasons. To suggest therefore that educational provisions which are based upon students' needs are thereby objective and scientific without any of the stigma of subjectivity or value judgement, is to merely confuse the issue. For when we speak of adjustment needs the question which has to be considered from an ethical standpoint is, "adjustment to what?" Similarly, when we talk of needs in terms of deficiencies or lacks, the ethical question remains one of determining optimum levels of balance, normality or equilibrium.

It should be clear that consideration of needs in selecting curriculum content, like the notion of interests also involves a number of ethical problems. In considering the concept of needs as a lack the determination of an optimum standard of balance or equilibrium is involved. Similarly, the notion of needs as desire or motive involves an appraisal of the worth of the object or end in view. In addition, there are certain theoretical difficulties associated with establishing the validity of the need concept as a viable construct. Thus, by itself, the identification of student needs does not indicate objective, scientific proposals



for curriculum content, for it is necessary to consider the ethical values which relate to the worth of such needs.

Komisar has referred to the claim that the school curriculum should meet the needs of students as the "needs policy" and the resulting educational program as the "needs curriculum".<sup>1</sup> He suggests that depending on the way need is interpreted, the needs policy turns out to be "sometimes trivial, sometimes indeterminate, and sometimes unsupported, but always unimportant."<sup>2</sup> For example, it often depends upon whether the school requirements or the social requirements are employed for determining student's needs. To say that the school should meet needs amounts to saying that the school should do whatever is necessary to fulfill its assigned tasks. This results in the trivial claim that the school should do what it should do. If, on the other hand, it is said that the school should meet the needs of society, then the claim is incomplete since it does not specify which societal needs should be met.

Similarly, when needs are interpreted as motives, it is not sufficient to say that schools should meet needs

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<sup>1</sup>Komisar, "'Need' and the Needs-Curriculum," pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



e.g. recognition, affection, achievement, etc., for there are numerous ways of gaining affection, recognition, achievement, etc. Thus, the needs policy is once again incomplete. Komisar also claims that the motive sense of need as it applies to curriculum is also a truism, for any curriculum is a needs curriculum in that it can be said to assist students in meeting needs.

The reason is that the very conception of basic needs makes them so ubiquitous and all-embracing that no such sustained activity as schooling could be completely alien to them.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem that in many cases in educational discourse statements about needs have attained the status of what Scheffler calls educational slogans.<sup>2</sup> When taken literally they amount at the very least to ambiguities and at the most to absurdities. But even the utilitarian value of the educational slogan as a "rallying symbol" for key ideas and movements which may be expressed more fully elsewhere, seem to be denied to the needs policy, or at least is a lost function. Komisar states:

If "need" has become too closely identified with a definite and controversial program, as I believe it has, then whatever utility it once possessed as a slogan has vanished.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Komisar, "'Need' and the Needs-Curriculum," p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Israel Scheffler, The Language of Education (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1960), Chapter II.

<sup>3</sup>Komisar, "'Need' and the Needs-Curriculum, p. 41.



It would not seem unreasonable, considering the frequency with which needs are invoked to justify almost any educational provision in the curriculum, to agree with Komisar's view.

However, not all uses of the statements of needs are completely vacuous or without some significance. For example, in specific educational contexts, the statement "if you want to attain X, then you need to develop skill Y" serves a real purpose and is quite meaningful. In such contexts, where the statement refers to certain deficiencies which ought to be eliminated if a particular goal is to be attained, the use of need is quite significant and meaningful. But even here it should be noted that the application of such statements depends to a considerable extent upon judgements about the desirability of attaining X, whatever that may be.

Like interests, the concept of need per se does not necessarily indicate educational provisions in curriculum content. Lists of students need do not represent objective, scientific and value free prescriptions for the selection of educational content, and learning experiences. In general, one may apply similar conditions to the consideration of student needs in selecting curriculum content, as was the case with interests. For the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion the meaning of need as a lack should be separated





from the sense of need as a motive or desire. Presuming that there is reliable evidence that a specific need exists, then activities to satisfy this need will be chosen from that general class of worth-while activities according to the rules of economy and self-sufficiency. Statements of needs used in suggesting curriculum content should avoid implying that they represent objective, scientific criteria for the selection of curriculum content. Ultimately, such needs depend for their significance on the cultural values within a society and the individual's perception of these values.

A particular problem is posed by the emphasis which is to be placed upon various needs in terms of their importance to the educational enterprise. It may be that a hierarchy of needs similar to that devised by Maslow<sup>1</sup> may be the most appropriate criteria to establish the relative importance of various needs for curriculum planning. While this complex and difficult problem is clearly central to curriculum decisions it deserves considerably more attention than it is possible to give it here. Whatever relative importance is attached to particular needs will be a function of the values to which the educational enterprise is committed in terms of what is considered realistically attainable in

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<sup>1</sup> A. H. Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954).



the time at its disposal. These values in turn must be qualified in terms of a meaningful rationale which justifies the reasons for their relative importance.

In summary, it would seem that the doctrine of need should be employed with some caution by curriculum planners in attempting to justify the selection of particular content in preference to others. Considering the obvious difficulties associated with not only the identification of the need, but also with the evaluation of the standards which represent its fulfillment and indeed the validity of the concept itself, it seems that the notion of need as a justification is open to question on several counts. In particular, when it is used in the sense of "basic" or "fundamental" needs it can only serve to increase ambiguity and vagueness in the use of the term.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE REALITIES OF THE SOCIAL MILIEU

In the last chapter it was pointed out how the social environment influences the notion of needs and the way in which they are perceived. It has also been shown how the concept of interests is closely related to "initial commitments" within the culture. But the social environment may have an even more direct impact upon the curriculum content which is taught in schools. It is often maintained by curriculum theorists that one of the most significant factors in selecting curriculum content is information derived from studies of society. It is also common in educational discourse to come across statements which declare that the schools' function is to preserve cultural continuity.

In general it is not hard to see how factors within a society may directly influence what is taught in the school. The realities of the social milieu are said to be the reason why we teach mechanical engineering rather than stonemasonry, business management rather than bartering techniques. The introduction into the curriculum of such subjects as driver training and citizenship education have often been in re-



sponse to forces and pressures from within the social environment. In many respects the function of the school in developing economically viable and productive students is in the public interest and the interests of the student himself. However, it is clear that the schools cannot satisfy all the claims made upon it by society. It is therefore necessary to establish criteria which will serve as guides to judging the significance and importance of the various forces exerted upon the school from the social milieu with regard to the selection of curriculum content.

Scheffler, for example, maintains that considerable confusion over the school's role with regard to social forces results from a misuse of what he calls the "organic metaphor".<sup>1</sup> In the case of education, this metaphor involves an analogy between cultural continuity and organic regeneration. He points out that when we talk of the function of a biological mechanism, we usually refer to its contribution to its normal or satisfactory working. In the case of physical organisms this concept is usually quite clear and relatively well-established. However, in the case of the function which education is said to serve in contributing to the normal or satisfactory working of the culture, a clear notion of normal or satisfactory

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<sup>1</sup>Scheffler, The Language of Education, Chapter III.





working is distinctly lacking. Thus, the function of education in this sense is in no way analogous to the clarity of function statements in biology. In this regard the notion of cultural continuity as it relates to education is in much the same position as the notion of adjustment. Even when a particular standard of normality in terms of cultural continuity is provided, the moral questions which are significant in educational and social judgements are absent from the picture. Even worse:

. . . the positive moral connotation of the term "function" (which derives, perhaps, from its relation to biologically satisfactory working which is generally favored) suggests that the notion of social function also implies moral value.<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that content which is incorporated in the curriculum on the basis of its social function does not necessarily mean that it is thereby of value or worthwhile. It often seems that if one can cite a social function which some particular curriculum content can be said to serve then the implication is made that it is thereby worth-while. It would appear that Scheffler's explanation in terms of the "organic metaphor", probably accounts for the ease with which it is possible to pass from social "Function" statements to implications about values. As Scheffler further states, "The moral issues are not only

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<sup>1</sup>Scheffler, The Language of Education, p. 56.



not stressed in social 'function' statements, but are often confused by the socially irrelevant connotation of value surrounding the term 'function'".<sup>1</sup> To cite, as a justification for some particular curriculum content, its social function, does not show that teachers ought to teach such content. Whether teachers ought to teach such content is a serious moral question which must be argued for on independent grounds.

This is an important point for curriculum development. For justification in terms of social function is frequently invoked in support of one set of content or another. The significant aspect of this practice is whether the social function is in itself worth perpetuating and whether it is of sufficient significance to merit attention, considering the other manifold tasks of the school and the amount of time available. As we have indicated, the degree to which social criteria influence curriculum content is also related to the rules of economy and self-sufficiency. However, there is a more important question raised by this point, i.e., whether the schools should reflect and support existing social values or act as the agents of social reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, an old debate, which is still

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<sup>1</sup> Scheffler, The Language of Education, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> For one of the most well-known and fundamental statements of this problem see, George S. Counts, Dare the School Build a New Social Order? (New York: Day, 1932). In addition for a more recent review and examination of this question see, Joe R. Burnett, "Changing the Social Order: The Role of Schooling," Educational Theory, XIX (Fall, 1969), pp. 327-336.



actively pursued, and it is not to be furthered here. In relation to the selection of curriculum content, however, it seems quite clear that because an activity is supported by the social milieu, this is not sufficient reason for it to be included in the curriculum and justified on the basis of its social function or its contribution to cultural continuity.

The problem nevertheless remains, of deciding which among the demands made by society, are significant for the curriculum. Perhaps an answer may be found by returning to the original question, "Why do this rather than that?" Having provided an answer to this question in terms of worth-while activities, then there would seem to be just reasons for the preservation of those social and cultural conditions which most easily facilitate both the asking of the question and the answering of it. In a sense these conditions are democratic in outline in that they constitute the maximum degree of personal liberty congruent with the minimum degree of conformity necessary for the existence of a society. The specific features of these conditions is an empirical question, but the broad outlines are clear. For social conditions which are antithetical to the pursuit of worth-while activities, i.e. activities which are involved in asking and answering the question "Why do this rather than that?" will be those associated with various forms of



tyranny persecution, discrimination and subversion. Once social conditions become opposed to the free pursuit of worth-while activities then the possibility of deciding what is worth-while is effectively diminished and likewise the society itself is threatened if not by its own self destruction then certainly by a qualitative decline in the life of its citizens. For without a knowledge and understanding of those activities which are central to asking the question "Why do this rather than that?" then judgements become capricious and arbitrary, devoid of both intellectual and moral content.

Far from remaining detached from social conditions, education has vested interest in ensuring the preservation and maintenance of those conditions which allow for the pursuit of worth-while activities commensurate with the maintenance of minimal cohesion necessary for the existence of a society. This does not amount to a mere distum on academic freedom. The concern must also extend to the social milieu, for there is little point to establishing conditions of liberty within education if social conditions in the society at large do not also maintain this liberty. Since, as Peters indicates, to be educated is not to have arrived, "but to travel with a different view."<sup>1</sup> It makes

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<sup>1</sup>R. S. Peters, "Education as Initiation," in Philosophical Analysis and Education, ed. by Reginald D. Archambault, (New York: The Humanities Press, Inc., 1965), p. 110.





little sense to acquire a different view and then be refused a visa to travel.

Attempts have been made to develop curriculum based upon visions of an ideal society, but in general these attempts are prone to a number of difficulties. For the most part these discussions often contain notions like the worth of the individual, the dignity of mankind and respect for persons, which in themselves are usually too general to imply specific curricular content. In addition, the attempt to draw implications for curriculum content from conclusions about the nature of an ideal society often results in indoctrination procedures. Such procedures are usually based upon the idea that particular social norms and beliefs ought to be imposed upon students rather than held up for critical examination.

It would appear that education in terms of socialization and adjustment must inevitably involve indoctrinating procedures. Indeed, educational psychologists acknowledge this feature of the socialization process when they define it as, "learning the ways of behaving that help the individual fit into his particular group in each society . . . there is some molding process which produces this behavior."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lee J. Cronbach, Educational Psychology (London: Staples Press, 1954), p. 23.



Though one might consider any form of indoctrination undesirable at any level of development, there appear good reasons for employing some restraints on behavior within the confines of the school in order to facilitate its operations. Indoctrination in socially acceptable behavior patterns seems unavoidable during the early stages of development for there is little point in providing children with the freedom to make individual decisions which they are ill prepared to make with any real understanding. However, the danger lies in continuing and enforcing this conformity in social behavior beyond the stage of development when the student is both motivated and equipped to critically analyse the basis for particular social norms. The principal danger with "socialization" is that early patterns of presentation will be continued at later, less appropriate levels of development.

The process of socialization, then, while it may be unavoidable during the early years of schooling, gradually becomes less and less appropriate as the student is initiated into those activities which will allow him to undertake questions of value and behavior on his own. In this respect, the approach suggested by Oliver to the treatment of social science in schools has considerable merit to it.<sup>1</sup> Oliver's approach is to provide students

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<sup>1</sup>Donald W. Oliver, "The Selection of Content in the Social Sciences," Harvard Educational Review, XXVII (Fall, 1957).



with social science knowledge and understanding that will increase the student's ability to deal effectively with broad social issues confronting all citizens of a society. As such, the subject matter is oriented to social and moral problems existing within a society with the emphasis being, not on indicating the most desirable solutions, but rather on clarifying a number of possible solutions and indicating their consequences with regard to the social milieu in general. But even here the social problems and issues considered significant involve a value decision which in turn requires some justification.

Conditions, on the other hand, which discourage the student from critically examining established social values serves to limit the development of independent judgement and encourage rote conformity in social response. In this respect, Russells' distinction between the cultivation of the individual mind and the production of the useful citizen, is a valuable one. For where citizenship is understood in terms of adherence to social norms without understanding, examination or commitment on the part of the individual, then the result is to discourage the use of those qualities which are engendered by involvement with worth-while activities. For ultimately the individual will be more effective in his role as a citizen to the extent that he has acquired those qualities of critical thinking and judgement which are associated with indulging in worth-



while activities. Russell states:

All the Western nations admire Christ, who would certainly be suspect to Scotland Yard if he lived now, and would be refused American citizenship on account of his unwillingness to bear arms. This illustrates the ways in which citizenship as an ideal is inadequate, for as an ideal, it involves an absence of creativeness, and a willingness to acquiesce in the powers that be, whether oligarchic or democratic, which is contrary to what is characteristic of the greatest men, and tends, if over emphasised, to prevent ordinary men from attaining the greatness of which they are capable.<sup>1</sup>

So long as schools foster conformist behavior which is not subjected to critical analysis, scrutiny and question, they will fail to encourage the development of dispositions toward those democratic social conditions which are commensurate with the free pursuit of worthwhile activities. In a sense the fostering of such dispositions within the classroom presents the student with a smaller picture of the broader social milieu. For to the extent that the classroom presents conditions which are characterized by individual liberty and tolerance, the student is exposed to a social climate compatible with that necessary for the maintenance of a society conducive to the unimpeded pursuit of worthwhile activities. For it seems clear that the capacity to demonstrate democratic behavior is not necessarily acquired by learning

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<sup>1</sup>Russell, The Education of Western Man, p. 13.





facts about the beneficial effects of democracy. Without such active involvement, democracy degenerates into a formal facade. Peters states:

Such "education for democracy" consists largely in young people being initiated on an apprenticeship basis, into the working of democratic institutions. Without this, democracy itself becomes an "inert idea".<sup>1</sup>

In summary, it can be said that justification of curriculum content in terms of its social function often serves to obscure the serious examination of the educational and social significance of the content. This is particularly so when the "organic metaphor" is explicitly or implicitly involved in the discussion. The question of whether content ought to be included in the curriculum must be determined on independent ethical grounds. In addition, there is a case for the schools taking an active role in the development of dispositions toward the characteristic features of democratic organisation which are most conducive to the pursuit of worth-while activities, not only within the confines of the school, but within the broader social perspective.

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<sup>1</sup>R. S. Peters, Authority, Responsibility and Education. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959), p. 106.



## CHAPTER VII

### PHILOSOPHY AND CURRICULUM CONTENT

It was pointed out in the introduction that one of the ways in which curriculum theorists believe that curriculum content can be selected is through the application of a philosophical "screen" which is said to "imply" certain practices for education. Tyler, for example, maintains:

For a statement of philosophy to serve most helpfully as a set of standards or a screen in selecting objectives it needs to be stated clearly and for the main points the implications for educational objectives may need to be spelled out. Such a clear and analytical statement can be used by examining every proposed objective and noting whether the objective is in harmony with one or more main points in the philosophy, is in opposition or is unrelated to any of these points. Those in harmony with the philosophy will be identified as important objectives.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that on this view philosophical statements contain within themselves certain directives for educational practice which only need "to be spelled out" for the curriculum planner, for him to see the connection between theory and practice. That such a view is simplistic is fairly obvious

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<sup>1</sup>Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, p. 37.



to anyone acquainted with the difficulties of establishing prescriptions for practice from philosophical positions. That such a view exists, however, is perhaps an indication that there is a gap in educational philosophy whereby it has not altogether made its role clear to other areas within the general field of education. For it seems that there are a great many problems associated with this kind of activity. Sidney Hook, for example, maintains:

There is a great deal of nonsense talked about philosophy of education. This is particularly true of claims that a metaphysical or epistemological position has logical implications for educational theory and practice . . . (thus) To encourage philosophers . . . to derive (a philosophy of education) from some philosophic position such as Idealism, Realism, Thomism, Pragmatism or Existentialism is to encourage them to perpetuate garrulous absurdities.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there are those, who, while agreeing that the nature of the relationship between philosophy and prescriptions for educational practice is not one of logical implication, nevertheless insist that it is possible to obtain directive for educational practice from philosophic statements. Joe R. Burnett<sup>2</sup>, for instance,

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<sup>1</sup>Sidney Hook, "Note on a Philosophy of Education," Harvard Educational Review, XXVI (Spring, 1956), pp. 145, 148.

<sup>2</sup>Joe R. Burnett, "Some Observations on the Logical Implications of Philosophic Theory for Educational Theory and Practice," in Philosophic Problems and Education, ed. by Young Pai and Joseph T. Myers, (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1967), pp. 28-34.



contends that while philosophical positions do not indicate "formal implications" it is possible to derive implications for educational practice by defining "logical implication" in what is called a "situational" manner. The situational view maintains that people do not come to theory without preconceived views and experiences about facts and values which afford a means of deriving particular directives for practice from general theory. Burnett claims that, for the most part, people are unaware that they are doing their "connecting". He says the process appears to be "more of an imaginative or psychological 'art' than a strict, logical process."<sup>1</sup> Burnett describes the "situational" implication in this manner:

Basically and briefly, the situational view holds that the individual who confronts general theory is often possessed of a body of knowledges and values. When these values and knowledges are given a symbolic expression which can be connected for the effecting of logical process with theory, the possibility of logical derivation of further symbolic formulations becomes obvious.<sup>2</sup>

Briefly the conditions which Burnett claims to be "probably not sufficient ones" but which are useful in increasing the

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<sup>1</sup>Burnett, "Some Observations on the Logical Implications of Philosophic Theory for Educational Theory and Practice," p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 31.





effectiveness of making connections, are (1) Full knowledge of the philosophic theory being utilized. (2) Knowledge of the connections, if any, made by the formulator of the general philosophic theory. (3) Knowledge of empirical reality associated with the prescription for practice. (4) Use of philosophic theory which is based on tested empirical evidence. (5) Utilization of terminology which allows valid inference. Burnett asserts that his analysis does allow defensible logical implications to be made from philosophy to practical situations, where the formal logical implication is not possible.

Hobert Burns<sup>1</sup>, on the other hand, suggests that Burnett has merely defined the problem away rather than solved it. In other words, Burnett has not tackled the central question of the nature of the relationship between formal philosophy and educational practice, he has merely redefined the notion of "logical implication" to account for the phenomenon of "connecting" philosophy with practice. He has not made clear what kind of connection this is.

According to Burns, the idea of there being any

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<sup>1</sup>Hobert W. Burns, "The Logic of the 'Educational Implication'," in Philosophic Problems and Education, ed. by Young Pai and Joseph T. Myers, (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1967), pp. 35-47.



logical implications for practice which are derived from philosophical positions is ruled out simply by the notion that from any philosophical position a variety of conflicting directives may be obtained. Thomists, for example, are often in dispute about the precise nature of curriculum content appropriate to a Thomistic education, yet they may all agree on the basic philosophical position of Thomistic philosophy. Directives of this sort may be obtained, but they cannot be said to be ones of logical implication. He illustrates this point further by reference to the fact that in statements of logical implication, one means that there is a necessary connection between two concepts or phenomena. Statements like "P implies Q" means that there is a necessary connection between P and Q such that P presupposes Q. The concept of "bachelor" logically implies "an unmarried man". In other words, there is a necessary connection between "bachelor" and a man being "unmarried" such that one could not be a "bachelor" without being "an unmarried man". But it is clear that we cannot claim the same kind of relationship between the philosophical position that "democracy assures the greatest individual growth and freedom" and the educational directive that "schools should be democratically organised and administered". Indeed, so long as one insists that "educational implication" involves there being a necessary connection, it matters not whether



the directive antecedent is philosophy, the behavioral sciences, or Zen Bhuddism. The connection cannot be one of strict logical necessity.

Nevertheless, there is an obvious sense in which what men believe is often the reason why they act in particular ways. That a man acts in some particular way because he believes that certain consequences will follow is often given as an explanation for a variety of actions. This represents another meaning of the word "implication" namely that:

The beliefs of an individual can be said to be the casual conditions of his actions; in this sense his actions are implied by his beliefs, and his beliefs are to be inferred from his actions.<sup>1</sup>

For example, the stranger in a town who stops a passer-by in order to ask him for directions clearly believes that the passer-by will more than likely be more familiar with the town than he himself is. Thus, his belief is a necessary condition, for if he did not believe that the passer-by was more likely to be more familiar with the township than he himself was, he wouldn't bother to ask him for directions. This implication is said to be psychological rather than logical. Burns explains further:

In this usage, the meaning of "educational implication" is that particular educational practices are presupposed by the particular philosophic

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<sup>1</sup>Burns, "The Logic of the 'Educational Implication'," p. 41.



beliefs about the nature of education or man, else those educational practices would be meaningless and irrational. In this way, a necessary connection may be seen to exist between philosophy and educational practice. It is important to note that these educational practices are not logically implied by philosophy, nor are they logically implied by one's belief in a philosophy; rather, they are in some manner psychologically implied in a pragmatic means-ending sense.<sup>1</sup>

Burns suggests that "educational implication" in this psychological sense, might be formalized by reference to implications of actions and implications of belief. For example, the act of placing a child in a "gifted class" implies that he has been identified by some procedure or other as a "gifted child". There is thus a pragmatic implication derived from the action such that being placed in a gifted class logically implies that the child is gifted. Put another way, pragmatic implications of actions can be defined as:

An act A implies a proposition p if, and only if, the proposition "person X is performing act A" itself entails p. This type of pragmatic implication is therefore defined in terms of entailment.<sup>2</sup>

While pragmatic implications of beliefs are not ones of entailment there are several features which specify its

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<sup>1</sup>Burns, "The Logic of the 'Educational Implication'," p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 44.





particular form. For example, on observing a high school teacher interrogating a student about some missing school property, we make inferences about the beliefs of the teacher, about the antecedents and consequents of the act, and conditional propositions about the conditions which must obtain if the desired outcome is to result. These are inferences which are based on what prior knowledge has shown to be the consequences of similar acts, and a knowledge of the person's purpose and the situation in which he acts. Burns explains:

As a general rule, therefore, acts of this type always imply psychological propositions about the actor's state of mind, empirical propositions about the "reason for" or "point of" the act, and conditional propositions about the material conditions which must obtain if the desired or probable outcome of the act is to be realized.<sup>1</sup>

Such pragmatic implications can only make sense if one makes an assumption that the agent is acting rationally with some purpose in mind. In other words, it is assumed that the action is intended to bring about a certain state of affairs with respect to the person performing the act. Pragmatic implication assumes some purposive action on the part of the agent and obviously involves the making of means-ends judgements. Burns states:

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<sup>1</sup>Burns, "The Logic of the 'Educational Implication'," p. 44.



. . . the general rule governing propositions pragmatically implied from an act is that such propositions come to be the conditions of rational action in that specific situation . . .<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the issue of educational implication is complicated by the fact that actions and beliefs in education are in many cases normative and have an "ought" about them. The whole process of educational decision-making is fraught with moral and value laden issues quite apart from the logical dimension of educational implications. It seems that it is not logically possible to imply an answer to these evaluative questions in education by referring to philosophical statements. As Bandman indicates:

To deduce "statements about the aims of a system of education or its curriculum from purely philosophical statements" commits the fallacy, long ago noted by Hume, of deriving what ought to be from what is. This fallacy is more than a matter of grammar; it is a matter of a conclusion that contains more than there is in the premises.<sup>2</sup>

Bandman is here referring to the "is-ought dilemma" or the dichotomy between facts and values which was formulated by the Scottish empiricist David Hume. However, there is still considerable discussion about this problem and it seems that under certain conditions it may be pos-

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<sup>1</sup>Burns, "The Logic of the 'Educational Implication'," p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Bertram Bandman, The Place of Reasoning in Education (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1967), p. 55.



sible to derive an "ought" from an "is".<sup>1</sup> However, Bandman demonstrates further that no metaphysical or moral arguments can succeed in "proving" a conclusion of the form "X should be taught". He cites as his own reasons for this claim the fact that metaphysical and moral arguments are not open to proof in terms of truth and falsity. Such arguments are therefore persuasive and not demonstrative. One critic of Bandman's position has claimed that it is not altogether clear that moral statements are neither true nor false since most of the arguments offered in support of this notion have been discredited and no longer held to be convincing.<sup>2</sup> Yet Bandman fails to argue effectively for this position. He also attacks Bandman on a number of analytic and logical points which are said to contain certain fallacies. However, whether one accepts as potent the criticisms made against Bandman's position it would seem that it is still possible to acknowledge the usefulness of the con-

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<sup>1</sup>For several accounts of the way in which some philosophers propose getting around this problem, see John R. Searle, "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," Philosophical Review, LXXIII (1964), pp. 43-58. A. C. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'," Philosophical Review, LXVIII (1959), pp. 451-468. Philippa Foot, "Moral Arguments," Mind, LXVII (1958), pp. 502-513, and A. I. Melden, "Reasons for Action and Matters of Fact," Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Society, XXXV (1961-62), 49-65.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard J. Waks, "Review of Bertram Bandman's The Place of Reason in Education," Educational Theory, XVII (April, 1967), pp. 355-363.



ditions for evaluating the cogency of moral arguments which he describes. He maintains that such arguments consist of three components. (1) The Moral premise. (2) The factual or "instrumental premise", and (3) The conclusion of the form "X should be taught." An example of a cogent argument is:

- M. True accounts of the origin of human life on earth should be taught.
- I. The theory of evolution is a true account of the origin of human life on earth.
- T. Therefore, the theory of evolution should be taught.

The principle governing the moral component (M) is that it must be universal in the sense of being "universalizable". In other words, the moral component must be a maxim which in Kant's terms "could be willed to be a universal law." A maxim is said to be universalizable when any references to individuals can be eliminated.<sup>1</sup> The principle governing the instrumental premise (I) is called the "instrumental principle" which states that the instrumental premise must be true and open to falsifying evidence.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the principle which governs the conclusion (T) is the "pedagogical principle" which states that in the conclusion "X should be taught", the X must be capable of being meaningfully

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<sup>1</sup>Bandman, The Place of Reason in Education, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 159.





taught and successfully learned.<sup>1</sup> An argument is said to be cogent or gives good reason for deciding to act on one of two contradictory answers to the question "What should be taught?" if:

. . . there is a universalizable moral principle and if the answer is open to denial through falsifiability of the instrumental premise and relevant pedagogical considerations.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding the contentious points in Bandman's argument raised by his critics, it would appear that the general form of his "conditions for cogency" in argument have considerable pragmatic value in the guidance of practical reason in the selection of curriculum content. In view of the fact that it seems fairly well established that formal logic is not suited to deriving implications for educational practice the form of the argument which Bandman offers at least gives some practical assistance in assessing the merit of arguments offered in support of the selection of curriculum content. In some ways, the general form of Bandman's argument parallels the discussion undertaken here in that the moral, psychological and logical problems associated with attempts to justify the selection of curriculum content are clarified and examined.

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<sup>1</sup>Bandman, The Place of Reason in Education, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 167.



It seems clear that while it is possible to establish a connection between philosophy and educational practice, this connection cannot be explained in terms of strictly logical implication. Certainly, the activity of deriving educational implications from philosophic statements amounts to considerably more than being "spelled out". It seems that a number of factors need to be taken into consideration when performing this task and, although, as Burns asserts, "we cannot explain the precise nature of the 'educational implication'," <sup>1</sup> we can draw on philosophy as a guiding force for actual educational behavior through a pragmatic form of implication. Finally, while formal logic may not be appropriate, as Bandman has suggested, there are alternative methods of assessing arguments which are offered in support of conclusions obtained in response to the question, "What should be taught?"

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<sup>1</sup>Burns, "The Logic of the 'Educational Implication'," p. 47.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Thus, we return to the initial question, "What ought to be taught?" While it is possible to apply psychological, sociological and philosophic criteria in order to guide the process, it is evident that these criteria in themselves are fraught with a number of theoretical problems.

There are many forces operating on the educational institution to serve a variety of purposes. Indeed, it often seems that each new problem which a society or a nation faces is reflected in another addition to the school curriculum. The danger of this additive approach is that the curriculum eventually becomes an amorphous collection of unrelated offerings whose basic worth has not been seriously examined. The school is clearly limited in the purposes it can serve. It cannot be all things to all people and in an age of rapid technological and social change, additional strains are placed upon its resources.

The question of priorities then becomes a matter of deep significance. Selecting curriculum content



must be a task which is carried out with an understanding and knowledge of the various factors involved. An attempt has been made in the present work to indicate in general terms, the complexity of the problems which curriculum planners face in establishing valid and worth-while criteria for the selection of curriculum content. The simplistic view that all one need do is identify such things as the needs and interests of students, the demands of society, etc., is hardly sufficient. A number of unspoken assumptions are inherent in such an approach and the issues often seem far from clear.

Ultimately, the resolution of the serious problems which surround the process of curriculum development, rests upon the answers to several difficult moral and theoretical questions, notwithstanding the empirical problems associated with them. "What qualities ought the individual acquire in the course of his education?" "What skills and concepts are fundamental to survival in the modern age?" "On what basis can the school judge those among its tasks which are most worth-while?" The answers to these and other questions are intimately related to the process of curriculum development and carry profound implications for the selection of curriculum content.

While it may appear that this study concludes with





as many questions as it began, perhaps the questions themselves and the issues which they raise have been clarified somewhat. The process of selecting curriculum content, if it is to be effective and valuable, requires more than the application of specific criteria. It seems doubtful if any of these criteria, which have been discussed here, indicate in themselves which curriculum content ought to be included in the education of the young. Rather each criterion, if it is to be meaningful, appears dependent upon the resolution of a number of other questions. To the degree that educators devote concern and effort to considering these questions, the process of selecting curriculum content is likely to be sounder and more worth-while.



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